



# Tales of Texas

## NEWSLETTER



July 2025

This issue of Tales of Texas concerns a little known but extremely critical incident in our history. The Nullification Crisis.

The headline photo above is of the proclamation of President Jackson as he dealt with the Nullification Crisis.

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## The Nullification Incident

Talk about a constitutional crisis! Let's talk about a real humdinger. The Nullification Crisis in the early 1830's marked the most serious confrontation between state and federal authority in the early years of the United States. Centered in South Carolina during the presidency of Andrew Jackson, the situation exposed deep divisions over tariffs, state sovereignty, and the very meaning of the Union itself.

"What does this have to do with Texas?" you may ask. Texas was born out of the interactions between the personalities involved. First, Andrew Jackson, the president. Second, John C. Calhoun, the vice-president. And third: Sam Houston, a protégé of Andrew Jackson and a political enemy of John C. Calhoun.

Jackson and Houston were, above all else, Unionists, loyal to the United States, first and foremost. You should recall that in those days, presidents didn't get to pick their running mates as they do now. The vice-president normally was from the other side of the aisle. Our Founding Fathers probably thought it was a good idea at the time, but, in practice, it was disastrous. Abraham Lincoln's assassination put a political opposite in the White House and ruined Lincoln's vision for Reconstruction. We are still paying for it today.

John C. Calhoun didn't hold the Union dear or even important. His differences with Houston went back years to when Sam was a young army officer who negotiated deals between the Union and the Indians. The Nullification Crisis started with John C. Calhoun in his native state of South Carolina.



# Tales of Texas



President  
Andrew Jackson

The Tariff of 1828 passed into federal law. It was designed to protect American industry by raising import duties on foreign goods such as textiles and iron. Calhoun and the South thought the tariff unfairly favored Northern industry at their expense. Calhoun then developed a bold theory: *nullification*.

Nullification says that a state has the right to nullify any federal law it deemed unconstitutional. The state under this theory could pick and choose what federal laws they wanted to be enforced or ignored in their states. This is what is now referred to as “states’ rights.”

South Carolina convened a state convention that proclaimed the Tariff of 1828 was null and void within its borders. Any business concern that wanted sanctuary from federal taxation could relocate to South Carolina. Calhoun warned that any federal attempt to enforce the tariffs would justify secession.

Jackson responded with force and clarity. In December 1832, he issued his famous “Proclamation to the People of South Carolina,” denouncing nullification as incompatible with the Constitution and warning that disunion by armed force was treason. He also secured the passage of a bill that would authorize him to use force—the “Force Bill.”

Faced with the possibility of armed conflict from a powerful president, South Carolina backed down. In March 1833, the state convention reconvened and repealed its nullification ordinance. Calhoun resigned as vice-president and worked for the theory of nullification the rest of his life. South Carolina owed no duty to its sister states, according to him and others so like-minded.

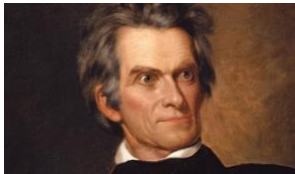


Political Situation of the  
Time

The Union stood...for now. Men like Jackson and Houston held the Union in the highest regard. Ultimately, South Carolina would nullify what it called “the compact known as the United States Constitution.” Jackson and Calhoun both passed away by the time that day happened, December 20, 1860. Houston was the governor of Texas. He said, “No nation can survive the right of secession.” He refused to take an oath to the Confederacy, so the Confederate state of Texas removed him from office. He never recognized that authority, nor did President Lincoln who considered Houston the governor of Texas until the great general, congressman, senator, and governor passed away on July 26, 1863.



Sam Houston



John C. Calhoun

The same words you may hear today have been thrown around our country for two hundred years. Words like sanctuary, tariff, would-be king, states' rights, and constitutional all ring across the landscape in our time. If John C. Calhoun, Andrew Jackson, and Sam Houston were walking on our streets today, the one word they would share a laugh over would be the word *unprecedented*.

Could "nullification" happen today? It's an unfamiliar word for the same old argument. When does the national interest surpass the sovereignty of an individual state? Does it happen when a state attempts to prohibit federal officers from enforcing desegregation or immigration law that is in our federal code? Does it happen when a state makes a drug legal against federal law? Does it happen when a strong president is called a "king" as he mobilizes a state national guard? These are not academic questions. Can "nullification" happen today? You tell me.



God Bless the United States of  
America in this its 249<sup>th</sup> year of  
Independence!